



1616 P STREET, N.W., SUITE 200 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
PHONE: 202-939-3800 • FAX: 202-939-3868

Media Advisory

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Mississippi Landowner Wins 2004 National Wetlands Award

Jack Branning of Vicksburg, Mississippi has won the 2004 National Wetlands Award for Landowner Stewardship. He will be honored at a ceremony on May 20th at the Senate Caucus Room in Washington, DC in recognition of his efforts to restore wetlands on a 3,498-acre farm.

Branning enrolled his entire farm in the permanent protection of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Wetlands Reserve Program. With help from NRCS, Branning developed an intensive restoration plan that maximizes habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent species by providing a diversity of wetland types, including seasonally flooded bottomland hardwoods, moist-soil wetlands, emergent marshes, shrub/scrub wetlands, and deepwater habitat.

"Mr. Branning's dedication and enthusiasm for his restoration project and his continuing management efforts have made it a wetland showplace," said Kevin Nelms, a wildlife biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mississippi. "He genuinely wants his land to be the best wetland habitat it can be and is continually working to achieve that goal. Mr. Branning is always willing and ready to share his project with others and has become a great advocate and spokesperson for wetland restoration."

Although the restoration construction was completed in 2003, Branning, with part-time help, devotes more than 900 hours annually to wetland management. The property now boasts 2,675 acres of naturally flooded bottomland hardwoods and 757 acres of manageable wetlands. He has fostered habitat for at least 43 different species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, including threatened wood storks and bald eagles. Mr. Branning's conservation efforts have also significantly increased the effective habitat of the adjacent Delta National Forest.

Since 1989, the National Wetlands Awards program has honored exceptional individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary effort, innovation, and excellence in wetland conservation, research, or education through programs or projects at the regional, state, or local level. The program is co-sponsored by the Environmental Law Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"We are grateful for the exceptional efforts of these awardees," said Major General Carl A. Strock, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "Their efforts to protect and preserve our nation's wetlands help sustain healthy aquatic habitats for diverse species of plants, fish, and wildlife. The well-being of natural communities is essential to the quality of our lives."

For more information please contact Erica Pencak at the Environmental Law Institute at (202) 939-3822 or wetlandsawards@eli.org, or visit www.eli.org/nwa/nwaprogram.htm.

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